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# PRINCIPAL WELLNESS: PRINCIPALS' MANAGING THEIR WELLBEING

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PRINCIPAL WELLNESS: PRINCIPALS' MANAGING THEIR WELLBEING

by

Leah M. Richardson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

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Major: Educational Studies

(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Dr. Marilyn Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

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# PRINCIPAL WELLNESS: PRINCIPALS' MANAGING THEIR WELLBEING

Leah Marie Richardson, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2020

Advisor: Dr. Marilyn L. Grady

Principals continue to search for the formula with the power to strengthen their leadership skills that will have an impact on achievement. Principals addressing their wellbeing is a strategy that can benefit the effectiveness of the use of their leadership skills. The purpose of this study was to describe principal wellness through the literature on the topic and to provide strategies for principals to manage their wellness. The review of the research and literature addressed principal wellness and included topics such as: principals working in isolation, developing healthier habits to minimize adverse health impacts on principals, engaging and modeling self-care, support system development for principals, and enhancing leadership self-efficacy. The research on these topics suggests strategies for principals as they strive to maintain wellness is their challenging role. Recommendations are presented focusing on the topics with provided resources to assist principals in identifying and developing a plan for their overall wellness for prioritization when addressing their wellness.

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## Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to describe principal wellness through the literature on the topic and to provide strategies for principals to manage their wellness.

The following review of the research and literature addresses principal wellness and includes topics such as: principals working in isolation, developing healthier habits to minimize adverse health impacts on principals, engaging and modeling self-care, support system development for principals, and enhancing leadership self-efficacy. The research on these topics suggest strategies for principals as they strive to maintain wellness is their challenging role.

### Working in Isolation

Kelly (2019) focused on the issues facing overworked and stressed educators around the world. She emphasized that women make up approximately three-quarters of the educational career population. Research shows that women report higher distress days than men (2018 APA Stress in America Study). Components that are presented as stressors for leaders; decreased job satisfaction, lack of job flexibility, and limited advancement opportunities for women compared to men. Kelly referenced, Risse, 2018, who reported stressors that impact women's workload as they over-invest in their careers by working to achieve unnecessary credentials compared to men. Kelly's findings were that leaders are coping with stress due to various variables working in isolation thus creating loneliness. Suggestions were that others, government and school, should take responsibility for supporting principal wellbeing and support opportunities for interpersonal connections for leaders, so that they are not working in isolation. Another

finding demonstrated that school leaders least vulnerable to isolation were part of highly collaborative teams and built positive relationships with their staff. Kelly noted unhealthy habits due to working in isolation leading the lack of social interaction. Kelly referenced research (Holt-Lunstad, 2015) on how the lack of social connections can damage one's health such as leading to 15 cigarettes a day. Kelly noted the importance of being authentic and vulnerable as a more open leadership style in order to connect with others thus reducing loneliness. Kelly related the loneliness experienced by individuals who had no hobbies, interests, or social interactions outside of their professional careers. Kelly recommended that governments and schools find ways of decreasing workloads while also recognizing the stress factors that impact women's higher stress levels. To reduce principals working in isolation, professional leadership coaches can be employed. The coaches could provide advisory and collaborative practices. However, Kelly suggested more than half of the participants in the study reported emotional strain on their personal and professional lives.

### Healthy Habits

Beisser et. al., (2014) investigated work-life balance, health, and nutrition status of secondary administrators. The research sought to understand:

1. Principal's responsibility to foster healthy environments, create healthy environments, and personal modeling of a healthy lifestyle
2. How principals balance home and work
3. The principals' choices and habits regarding health and nutrition

As identified by Beisser et. al., (2014), there is a lack of attention to the health and wellness of school administrators. Referenced within (Beisser et. al., 2014), the U.S.

Department of Education report of 2006 indicated that principals work more than 60 hours per week. As noted by (Beisser et. al., 2014) there has been an increase in principal expectations with “little to no relief from previously existing elements of the principals’ role.” The National Wellness Institute (2013) defined wellness as an “active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence” and a conscious effort to “achieve full potential that encompasses lifestyle, mental, and spiritual well-being.” Prior research stated that physical activity positively impacts brain functioning and disease prevention (Beisser et. al., 2014). Beisser et. al., (2014) also referenced, Ratey & Hagerman, (2008), who noted that exercise promotes brain activity, greater cognitive flexibility, executive functioning, and reduced anxiety and depression. As for nutrition, Sorhaindo & Feinstein, (2006) stated that irritability, aggression, and negative personality changes have been linked to poor nutritional practices. This mixed-method design allowed for quantitative inquiry using a sliding scale with an open-ended question for qualitative data on three topics: work-life balance, health, and nutrition. The topic, work-life balance, questions focused on personal interests, supportive personal networks, supportive professional networks, and stress levels. The health and nutrition questions provided insight into individual responses to eating habits, exercise, and sleep. Among the findings of Beisser et. al., (2014), the secondary principals’ responses indicated passion they had for their jobs; however, the open-ended comments revealed that many were “ill equipped with strategies to balance that passion with wellness components of their personal lives.”

Results indicated that principals found it challenging to balance time demands. Although they wanted to model their belief in a healthy lifestyle, there was a challenge in determining what to “give up” to create a better personal and professional balance.



Beisser et. al., (2014) found that stress level affects a principal's ability to model a healthy lifestyle. Research responses also indicated that principals in years 1 to 5 had higher stress levels. When the stress is more significant, there is less focus on wellness behaviors. Beisser et. al., (2014) aligned wellness behaviors to; contact with other administrators, engagement in personal interests, healthy eating habits, physical activity, time with supportive others, and feeling refreshed after sleep. The narratives from older principals indicated that they could manage high stress with healthy lifestyle choices in order to have a better work-life balance. With 21-25 years of experience, one respondent stated she had to be more intentional and disciplined for work-life balance. On the issue of nutrition, Beisser et. al., (2014) found that time constraints of the job caused principals not to have time for breakfast, lunch, or even exercise. The implications for professional practice offered by Beisser et. al., (2014) were to be physically active, eat healthy, seek out mentors, collaborate with peers, use a collaborative leadership style, and strengthen a healthier school environment by modeling a healthy lifestyle, as well as practice mindfulness.

### Self-Care

The purpose of Cenkseven-Onder and Sari's, (2009) study was to determine how teachers' subjective well-being is predicted by their perceptions about the quality of school life and burnout levels. The literature presented in the study highlighted individuals' subjective well-being for a better understanding of how positive and negative effects impact it. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) shared Myers and Diener's, (2005) definitions of subjective well-being as "the relative presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and satisfaction with life". They mentioned "two components of well-

being: emotional and cognitive” (Cenkseven-Onder & Sari, 2009). Epstein and McPartland (1976; cited in Mok and Flynn, 2002) indicated formal and informal components, “social or task-related experiences and by relationships with peers and figures of authority,” have an impact on school life. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) cited research from Yong and Yue (2007) that noted stress and burnout directly impact climate, low morale, attaining goals, and individuals leaving their jobs. Individuals and organizations are affected by work stress and burnout negatively (Cenkseven-Onder and Sari, 2009). Their study used multiple scales to measure life satisfaction, positive and negative effects, quality of school life, and teacher burnout among teachers in elementary schools. The findings presented job status, administrator, teachers, and curriculum as significant predictors for individuals’ subjective well-being. Mok and Flynn (2002; cited in Cenkseven-Onder and Sari, (2009) indicated that “status is related to individual’s feelings of self-worth and importance according to others within the school.” Additional findings presented the impact “coping with job-related stress” had on teacher burnout and being a significant predictor to both subjective well-being components. As a result, Cenkseven-Onder and Sari, (2009) concluded that teachers’ ability to manage stress effectively could lead to higher levels of subjective well-being. One of the findings directly related administrators to significant influencers on the Quality of School Life Scale for teachers. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) determined that if an administrator is known as a good leader, the school climate will be satisfactory for teachers, in turn impacting life satisfaction. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) indicated that these findings were related to interpersonal relationships. As a result of their study Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) recommend professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators on interpersonal relations and coping strategies for stress.

Pijanowski and Ray (2018) focused on research linking principals' ability to make difficult decisions, building robust organizational systems, and nurturing professional relationships to student success, retention of teachers, community support, and staff efficacy. Findings revealed, on average, a principal spends approximately 60 hours per week at work. Principals are a group that have poor habits of self-care due to the demands of the job (Pijanowski and Ray, 2018). Self-care can be related to how one spends time meditating, eating healthy, exercising, and sleeping. Pijanowski and Ray (2018) stated that poor self-care can directly impact principal performance. There is a drastic impact from chronic sleep deprivation on one's cognitive performance including; decrease in psychomotor response times, decreased effectiveness in attention intensive performance, short-term and working memory decline, and decreased capacity to learn new information (Pijanowski & Ray, 2018). Pijanowski and Ray (2018) noted that poor nutrition and moderate dehydration can limit cognitive performance and negatively affect energy consumption and distribution. These can cause long-term health problems and addictive habits. The result of poor hydration can be of concern as it can decrease cognitive function related to decision-making and feelings of mental fatigue (Pijanowski & Ray, 2018). Pijanowski and Ray (2018) suggested a basic level of self-care to include proper sleep, nutrition, and hydration to support higher levels of concentration for a principal's daily work. Researchers indicate that a lack of these basic level components for self-care are compared to intoxication. Pijanowski and Ray (2018) reference an example that less than six hours of sleep corresponds to functioning with a 0.1 percent blood alcohol concentration. As a result of poor self-care principals' lives can be more challenging at home and work while creating the negative effects of stress in their lives (Pijanowski & Ray, 2018).

## Support System

Igwebuike (2013) examined the school principals' health and wellness status as a determinant to quality educational service delivery in secondary schools. The literature referenced for the study expressed the critical role of a school principal as one who manages effective relationships with all stakeholders, interprets and implements all policies and regulations, and frequently engages in decision-making. Additional expectations, such as raising standards, motivating, and encouraging, are aspects of achieving excellence within a school. Igwebuike (2013) references Asiabeka (2010) sharing how administrative leaders control human and material resources of the school organization. The many facets a principal is responsible for require health and wellness to achieve goals such as; leader, supervisor, manager, school climate developer, change facilitator, and chief accounting officer (Asiabeka, 2010; cited in Igwebuike, 2013). The study's research sought to find out 1) How the school principals' health and wellness status enhance educational service delivery? and 2) To access measures that could be adopted to improve the school principal's health and wellness status. The method used a descriptive survey design to collect data from principals through a questionnaire developed by Igwebuike to measure principal health and wellness status for quality education service delivery. The study findings showed that the principal's health and wellness status allows him/her to provide services to achieve school goals to address the first research question. The highest-rated responses in urban schools impacting service delivery were; supervision of human and material resources for quality learning, effective guidance and counseling services for staff and students, enforcement of school rules for school discipline, and proper organization of school records. The second research

question relating to essential measures were to enhance school principals' health and wellness status presented as eleven measures rating them as a way to strengthen principal's health and wellness status. The five top highest measures in urban schools addressed by principals to enhance their health and wellness were; adequate infrastructural facilities in the school, relaxation, change of unhealthy lifestyle, provision of support service amenities for principals, and provision for and timely release of funds for school use. Odo (2009; cited in Igwebuike, 2013) stated principal's health and wellness status enable him or her to provide direction, exercise influence, and work with others to achieve goals. Ekwudalo (2010; cited in Igwebuike, 2013) emphasized that the school principal's health and wellness supports better communication and enhances the capabilities of effective relationships with students, staff, and community. A final conclusion using the findings (Igwebuike, 2013) stated that principals' responses demonstrate that to “enhance and sustain” principals health and wellness, government should adopt measures to provide schools with enough human and financial resources to enable principals to complete responsibilities effectively. Findings within a study completed by Madubum (2000; cited by Inwebuike, 2013) stated that inadequate resources and facilities are stressors for some principals. Further recommendation by (Igwebuike, 2013) ask governments to provide supports for aiding in principal health and wellness by ensuring proper human and material resources, principal's salary aligned equitably to their workload, education, and experience, provide principal incentives, provide health education to principals as preventatives, promote healthy habits, and provide health services.

Safir (2019) used a brief published on California's educational system to focus on centering principal well-being conversations around how to improve schools and how to

retain and sustain healthy, productive, thriving principals. The brief provided evidence that principal turnover in California was around 25 percent annually from 2010-2016. This led Safir to present a hypothesis about the role of principal well-being in a healthy school system attending to the social, emotional, and academic needs of students. Safir facilitated a statewide assembly in California centered around the principalship and issues of well-being and sustainability. Through engagement with principals, researchers, leaders of principal preparation programs, and professional development providers for leadership development, themes emerged to support and sustain principals. The themes unraveled from the study were presented as recommendations to support principals' wellness: "bottom-up" accountability, equitable and viable compensation, robust principal coaching models, high-quality "whole leader" principal professional learning, deep community engagement, and agency, autonomy, and distributed leadership. Understanding "bottom-up" accountability comes from the need for building principals to have district leaders ask them what they need to better support them in their leadership at the building level. The philosophy demonstrates that this leadership accountability would influence the same dialogue with teachers to benefit student performance. Equitable and viable compensation alludes to the differences between urban and rural, high poverty and low poverty, and overall workload responsibility. As for coaching models, these could offer induction programs and operational leadership with a focus on social-emotional emphasis. A high-quality "whole leader" approach provides informational learning and creates an opportunity for peer collaboration, deep listening, emotional support, conversations centered around current problems for decision-making. Principals seek the chance to assess and develop action plans for attaining goals and solving problems. This is where agency and autonomy come in.

Riley (2014) provided a longitudinal study that began in 2011 to monitor school principals and deputy/assistant principals health and well-being annually. Phillips and Sen (2011; cited in Riley, 2014) reported “work related stress was higher in education than across all other industries... with work-related mental ill-health... almost double the rate for all industry.” The project goal was to monitor the efficacy of stress reduction interventions for individuals and policy changes imposed on principals and deputy/assistant principals. The research questions (Riley, 2014) were designed to understand 1) Who thrives in principal roles? 2) Do groups just survive in their roles? 3) Do any groups show signs of adverse health, safety, and well-being outcomes? 4) Do any factors affect these groups, and in what ways? 5) Are changes to educational policy or policy implementation suggested by the result? The literature LaMontagne, et. al. (2007; cited by Riley, 2014) referenced occupational health and safety literature that categorizes interventions to improve workplaces into three types: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary interventions are known as those systematic approaches that are preventative measures to reduce stressors within the work environment. Those interventions that are more proactive measures can be related to coping strategies to manage stress and are secondary interventions. Interventions which support individuals through treatment are tertiary interventions meant to reduce the impact of the stress. As noted by Lyubomirsk, et. al., (2005; cited by Riley, 2014) “physical and psychological well-being have a significant effect on job performance.” The survey included three types of information provided by existing instruments. The comprehensive school demographics were drawn from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Williams, et. al., 2007), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Thomson, et. al., 2011), The MySchool Website (ACARA) and International Confederation of Principals. This

data provided the opportunity for comparisons to capture the diversity of school settings and types. Alongside the demographic items, personal demographic and historical information were gathered. Finally, the study sought principals' and assistant principals' quality of life and psychosocial coping skills through investigation. As a result of these surveys, focus groups can be developed to use the information for discussion and development of primary interventions. Also, there will also be principal and assistant principal volunteers who will engage in secondary interventions as a trial. The study provided information as feedback to school principals allowing them the opportunity for instant intervention strategies for handling their roles. The findings as they relate to health and well-being demonstrated principals and assistant principals worked 55-66 hours per week, had a high rate of desire for personal achievement, almost 50% took prescription medication for a diagnosed condition, had higher levels of emotional demands and labor that was required when compared to the general population, the greatest stressors were the quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. They experienced a higher prevalence of offensive behavior at work than the general population. Principals and assistant principals predictive attributes for high scores on health and well-being were found to be low on all positive measures (i.e. happiness, coping, relationships, self-worth) than the general population as well as higher on the negative measures (i.e. burnout, stress, sleeping troubles, somatic and cognitive stress symptoms) than the general population. As a result of this study (Riley, 2014), recommendations were as follows; improve principals' and assistant principals' well-being through professional support, provide professional learning, review the work practices using Job Demands-Resources Model of organizational health, and maintenance of dignity at work. In improving the well-being of principals through professional



support, the suggested interventions involve opportunities for principals and assistant principals to engage, build, and maintain professional support networks regularly. In addition to professional support networks, having an experienced principal or retiree mentor who supports through visits and “agenda-less” meetings could be beneficial. As for professional learning, there is a need for skill level development centered around emotional aspects of the leadership role. The review of job demands and resources can support work-life balance and support organizational/building structure for an equitable workload dependent on resource capital. Finally, the educational environment requires attention to offensive behaviors towards principals and assistant principals in order to replenish dignity within the work environment.

Riley (2015) completed a longitudinal study monitoring school principals and deputy/assistant principals’ health and well-being annually. The study's findings were used to uncover areas needing improvement for the benefit of principal and assistant principal’s health and well-being. Action steps were recommended, and annual findings were compared with past findings to determine effectiveness. As a result of the 2011-14 report, the government began to change political parties’ policies used in political debates, and increased media coverage raising awareness (Riley, 2015). Other councils and districts were interested as they inquired, replicated, and requested funding for the research (Riley, 2015). In light of the 2011-14 research findings, the Teachers Health Fund's reaction reduced wait time for teacher members’ access to psychological services from 12 months to 2 months, implemented rebates for tele-psychological services, and made distance from capital cities less of a burden (Riley, 2015). Study findings from 2015 provided comparative data that demonstrated positive progress while some presented adverse outcomes. There was an increase of 6% of principals and assistant

principals working hours during school terms; however, fewer principals worked during holidays. The importance of achievement has increased slightly among principals. An increased trend related to job satisfaction was reported in 2015 among principals. As for healthy eating and exercise maintenance, there was a significant difference in what the principals reported. The percentage of principals, 49%, taking prescription medication for a diagnosed condition has remained stable. According to the 2015 report, principals were still sustaining higher levels of emotional demand and emotional labor than the general population. Principals reported the same stressors being of high impact on their wellness: quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. The COPSOQ-II index for personal well-being and Assessment of Quality of Life-8D provided information that expressed principals' and assistant principals' well-being is below the general population average with positive measures continuing to be low and negative measures remaining high. Offensive behavior towards principals was high in 2014, and responses of 2015 indicate an increase. Overall, responses indicated increased job demands with resources needed, student and parent-related issues, and government initiatives being stressors. The most substantial increase among stressors was the mental health issues of both students and staff. The responses related to job resources have seen some increase; formal leadership education, job satisfaction, the degree to which individuals can influence their work, possibilities for development, the variation of work task, and self-efficacy level. Riley (2015) stated that these increases in resources support principal's ability to cope with increased demands. The recommendations are centered around several themes on what identified groups can do to help principal and assistant principal health and well-being; governments, employers, professional associations and unions, community, schools, educators, and research community. It is recommended that

governments adopt a whole government approach setting a budget and allowing autonomy in spending with transparency and concentrating on long-term efforts that are fundamentals (collaboration, creativity, trust-based, responsibility, professionalism, and equity). Employers' recommendations are noted as reducing job demands and increasing resources to increase one's level of social capital for coping in a high demanding job. In addition, a suggestion for employers is to trust rather than rule educators. The professional associations and unions can collaborate and speak with one voice and, in doing so, will gain more clout as a collective voice for discussing differences. As a community, the suggestions are for community members to support local schools and stop offensive behavior to aid in individual health and well-being. In schools, there should be an increased focus on identifying ways to grow internal social capital. The recommendation is to study schools that are achieving high levels of implementation strategies. Educators have several suggestions that come from this study; increase personal capital, respectfully speak back, ensure passions are harmonious, and take responsibility for work-life balance. In the research community, the suggestions are to provide better longitudinal evidence to impact change and sustainability amid issues, adopt the EMU methodology to identify exemplars and look for thresholds. Overall, (Riley, 2015) expressed a need to equip principals and assistant principals with resources "not just logistically, but also symbolically, emotionally, and intellectually".

Riley (2016) presented a similar study monitoring principals and deputy/assistant principals' health and well-being through a longitudinal study. The purpose remains the same in search of answers to the same questions. The study continues to gain presence in the media and support at the government level through political party policy. The South Australian government allocated .05 FTE for principals to spend at their discretion on

principal health and wellness (Riley, 2015). In 2016, two new scales were added to the survey: The Positive and Negative Affect Scale and the short form of the Basic Psychological Needs at Work. These new scales found that principals had significantly higher satisfaction levels for autonomy support. The findings of working hours in the 2016 study continue to be high, with most principals working 51-56 hours per week. The importance principals place on personal achievement continues to increase while personal relationships have remained stable throughout the longitudinal study. The importance placed on personal relationships continues to be valued by principals. There continues to be a vast difference in 2016 when reviewing the self-reported health maintenance across the six-year study with means being higher than five on a 1-10 scale. The prescription medication intake has dropped to 40% compared to 2015, 49%. The sources of stress that are the greatest have remained quantity of work and lack of focus on teaching and learning with an increase over time of stress caused by mental health issues among students and staff. Principal well-being measured by positive and negative components remains at a high level with positive being lower than the general population and negative being higher than the general population. The offensive behavior trends continue to impact most principals and assistant principals at a higher level than the general population. However, South Australia and Queensland have demonstrated differences in these trends as they have seen a decrease in offensive behavior since 2015. The findings for social capital in 2016 shown principals reporting higher levels of social capital aligned to their reporting of lower levels of job demands and increased resources. Although principals reported high social capital levels, the results represent a decrease in social capital reported since 2011. The health and well-being trends continue to decline and be of great concern. The study's recommendations continue to be the same: requests

for implementation of support from governments, employers, professional associations and unions, community, schools, educators, and the research communities. The strategies to impact principal and assistant principal's health and well-being are also the same as those of previous studies.

### Self-Efficacy

Guglielmi et. al., (2012) study investigated principals' well-being to identify the role of personal resources and personal demands as predictors of work engagement and burnout. It was hypothesized there may be a relationship between workaholism and burnout mediated by work demands; and, job resources may mediate between the relationship of self-efficacy and work engagement and burnout. The study surveyed school principals measuring personal resources, job resources, influence and participation, personal demands, job demands, inequity, work engagement, and burnout. The study aimed at finding evidence to support the hypotheses: 1) Self-efficacy is positively related to job resources. 2) Workaholism is positively associated with job demands. 3) Job resources mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and work engagement. 4) Job resources mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout. 5) Job demands mediate the relationship between workaholism and burnout. The study's findings support all the hypotheses and revealed the confidence level, self-efficacy, may lead principals to be more susceptible to identifying resources within the working environment, creating higher levels of work engagement and lower levels of burnout among principals. Pervin (1989; cited in Guglielmi et. al., 2012) stated, "behavior, attitudes, and well-being are determined jointly by the individual and the environment."

Implications deriving from the study include leadership focusing on employees' psychological well-being, including stress, work engagement, and positive moods. Relating these aspects to the principalship can develop leaders who become more efficient in exercising leadership. Kelloway and Barling (2010) noted leadership development results in leaders having a higher self-efficacy level resulting in a better sense of well-being. Guglielmi et. al., (2012) recommended training leaders to learn how to delegate can be a development tool for principals.

### Conclusion

In summary, principal health and well-being is a concern within K-12 buildings. However, attention appears to be influencing the need to identify factors impacting health and well-being: and, how proactive, preventative, and prescriptive measures can support principals. Some data trends identify stressors, healthy habits, and support systems that principals report impacting their roles and personal well-being. Principal health and well-being are a problematic issue that can affect performance in their administrative positions including overall student achievement and climate and culture of a building in order to maintain healthy students and staff. The components that can aid in supporting principal health and well-being are; limiting isolation, healthy habits, self-care, support systems, and self-efficacy. Identifying these factors can provide insightful information when developing a systematic approach that will support school community support, provide principals with professional development to build leadership skills and maintain personal wellness, and a bottom-up approach for accountability. There are critical practices that principals can use to influence their school commitment to become aware and manage individual wellness, monitoring wellness, welfare of the school community,

and model self-care. Establishing strategic plans at the district level for monitoring and promoting principal wellness can support developing one's self-efficacy, self-care, and healthy habits. Creating opportunities for principals to work collaboratively within a network can reduce working in isolation and allow personal relationships to become resources that will support decreasing perceived job demands. Developing a consistent and robust mentoring program can help principals build their capacity in many different areas for their well-being and success as a principal. The overall health and well-being of a principal is necessary to address and devise strategic plans for increasing their wellness and the influence they have on the school community's welfare to reduce burnout and health concerns.

### Recommendations

An individual's wellness directly impacts their health and personal and professional productivity. Wellness is about the health of the "whole individual"; physical, social, and emotional well-being. In reference to school principals' well-being, their wellness can also directly impact other individual's well-being, climate and culture within a building, and achieving goals and positive outcomes desired by the school community. It is critical to share that one's wellness results from their follow through with action steps; however, systematic plans that are developed and implemented can profoundly influence those action steps being carried out for positive results. Research has identified several topics that significantly burden principals' well-being and need attention from principals and district administration. When working to improve principals' wellness, the following topics, such as; principals working in isolation,

support systems, healthy habits, and self-care, can be beneficial when reflecting on individual's and organization's wellness.

Often principals note, being a principal is lonely. Now, of course, there are many individuals who work within their building; however, if you are the only principal, you are the only one with “all the information” that may impact decision making. A recommendation would be that principals develop and maintain practices with fellow principals to cast away the sense of loneliness, working in isolation. Research has found that interaction with people face-to-face can determine the level of isolation at work. When increasing face-to-face interaction, “working in isolation” can be reduced, supporting individual well-being by creating a sense of belonging, social support, and friendships. Several things that could enhance collegial interaction opportunities could be collaboration, interpersonal connections, mentoring, and shared leadership. The first step to breaking out of your bubble of “working in isolation” is to address the state of mind of loneliness by asking yourself, what practices you have in place for collegial interactions and at what level? Are you reserved and think others won’t understand? Do you allow time to be an obstacle for practices that could create a support system? Do you find opportunities to share your strengths and ideas regularly? Do you create an environment and relationships within your school community for shared leadership? How about listening to others to form a stronger bond that is personal and not just professional? Once you reflect on these questions, you can begin developing action steps that will allow for collegial interactions that will embrace and enhance individual wellness. A goal to meet personal wellness requires action steps for implementation. Several action steps include allowing for regular collaborative sessions with other principals, find ways to create stronger connections with colleagues (personal and



professional), reach out to mentor or connect with someone to mentor you, and create a shared leadership approach with your staff.

When you find yourself working with individuals for a common purpose, this can increase the support system for maintaining one's well-being. Along with removing oneself from working in isolation, another recommendation would be to assess additional support systems that are preventative measures for individual well-being. A few preventative measures for supporting principal wellness could be in an induction program, mentorship, and wellness initiative programs. While these are measures most often driven by district leadership, it could be beneficial for a principal to become creative in addressing these topics if they are not ones your district provides. Could you find principal organizations to belong to that will offer you this support? Could you use social media outlets to build collegial relationships? How could you start and sustain an initiative with colleagues to promote wellness as a team? An outcome of having support systems in place can allow for a well-tuned individual who can focus on teaching and learning, climate and culture, professional learning, and staff leadership development. When addressing wellness by structuring a support system that embraces physical, social and emotional aspects of the principalship, it can allow for opportunities of meeting the needs of staff wellness by modeling healthy habits.

Overall physical health can be a reflection of many identifiable topics that support a healthy body and mind. Recommendations to address physical health that influence individual's wellness are to assess your sleep, hydration, diet, and exercise. The amount and quality of sleep one gets each night can determine the level of concentration, ability to be productive, and impairments when making decisions. Health professionals recommend that an adult receive seven to nine hours of sleep each night. When sleeping

patterns are disrupted, it is challenging to overcome the loss of sleep. This creates the importance for principals to stick to a clear defined sleeping schedule, and if rest is lost, create a plan to make up for the sleep deprivation in small increments over time.

Individuals who retain the appropriate amount and quality of sleep recommended will lower stress, improve moods, increase the ability to pay attention, and better remember new information. Some of the factors that impact sleeping quality are related to screen time (phones, computers, television), sleeping environment (lighting, temperature, bedding), and overall sleeping hygiene. Research shows that those turning off their devices gain an additional hour of sleep a night. The Blue Light released from screens reduces the production of melatonin, sleep-induced hormone. The amount of screen time before bed and the intake throughout the day can have unfortunate results on an individual's sleeping pattern and quality of sleep. Sleep environment helps set the stage for quality sleep while sleep hygiene are the habits established to accompany the sleeping environment to ensure restful nights.

There are some factors linked explicitly to female sleep quality, and those are: menstrual cycles, pregnancy, and menopause. Taking the time to become aware and working to address these factors can improve one's sleep hygiene, healthy sleeping habits. It is also imperative to know that a lack of the recommended hours of sleep over time can affect your immune system making you more susceptible to illness. The next component for physical health is being well hydrated. Hydration not only supports physical health but mental performance too. The deprivation of fluids can create headaches, tiredness, mood changes, and loss of concentration. For adults, staying hydrated requires any drink containing the substance of water, including; caffeinated beverages and foods retaining water. However, the daily total water intake should be equivalent to 15.5 cups for men

and 11.5 cups for women. Doctors suggest following the recommendation of 8 glasses of water a day along with food containing water. As for diet, following the food pyramid for daily consumption is adequate. A suggestion is to become acquainted with serving size and ways to identify with the correct portion for meal preparation and serving. The last component for healthy habits involves exercise. It is recommended to be physically active (walking, sports, dancing, yoga, running) most days for 30 minutes (150 minutes a week) and activities that will strengthen muscles two days a week.

Our healthy habits are about creating a routine for physical well-being. When working to reach the ultimate goal toward wellness, self-care can support the emotional and social elements. An important recommendation would be for principals to engage in self-care, such as maintaining a work-life balance and practicing mindfulness. These recommendations also bring to light action steps that can benefit taking care of yourself. Several action steps include staying connected to friends and family, being involved with your community, a positive attitude, being a learner, learning to recognize and managing stress, getting enough sleep, and seeking health care professionals when needed. A large piece of the puzzle of self-care is preserving the balance between work and life. In balancing work and life, it is essential to set limits to reduce the adverse outcomes (fatigue, poor health, lost time with loved ones, and increased expectations) of being lopsided. One can develop a list of action steps for home and life as a check and balance for maintaining equilibrium. These action steps should demonstrate boundaries while also allowing for opportunities for grace. Taking time to unplug and be present is also a strategy for self-care. Mindfulness practices can build happiness and resilience when one can self-regulate attention with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance. Vital energy and clarity can be deprived under strains of stress, and redirecting negative

thoughts to positive can result in rich deposits to taking care of yourself. A suggestion is to create time within your day to have planned mindfulness moments, while also engaging in unplanned mindfulness moments to transform negative emotions and develop self-compassion. Some psychologists have identified twenty-four strengths, Character Strengths, that can lead individuals to positive emotions and relationships when practicing mindfulness. Many mindfulness practices can enhance one's well-being, but it is critical to find the time and stay consistent with your routine.

A principal's profession can present a high level of stress, a large workload, and long-term implications to one's health. These strategy recommendations can aid in the application of healthy habits to encourage actions that will promote wellness. The first step is in the identification process to determine areas for improvement for principal wellness. Then, one can strategically prioritize how to address areas of concern to individual well-being. Once there is a determination to begin, then focus on crafting action steps for a healthy lifestyle.

### Principal Wellness: Self-Identification

The areas for self-reflection identification using this checklist will provide insight on the following:

- 1) What work habits does the principal exhibit in reference to working in isolation?
- 2) What support systems does the principal have in place or have access to?
- 3) What personal and professional habits does the principal exhibit in reference to healthy habits?
- 4) How does the principal exercise self-care?

| <b>Working in Isolation</b>  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| Directions: As you self-reflect, use the first thought you have in response to each question to gain the best information to support planning for your wellness. | Yes | No |
| Do you collaborate with fellow principals on a regular basis?  |     |    |
| Do you interact with fellow principals on a personal level?  |     |    |
| Would you describe interactions with your fellow principals on the personal level as strong, interpersonal connections?  |     |    |
| Do you extend your support and experiences to other principals on a regular basis?   |     |    |
| Do you communicate frequently with building committees when problem-solving and planning?  |     |    |
| Do you have leaders within your building that you seek out for input on a regular basis?   |     |    |
| Are strategic plans, protocols, routines within your building established collectively through staff input?  |     |    |

| <b>Support Systems</b>   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| Directions: As you self-reflect, use the first thought you have in response to each question to gain the best information to support planning for your wellness. | Yes | No |
| Do you currently have a fellow principal that you would consider a mentor?   |     |    |
| Does your district provide you with professional leadership learning?  |     |    |
| Do you have the opportunity to engage in activities with fellow principals or mentors that emphasize your social and emotional wellness?                         |     |    |
| Do you engage in networking with other principals face-to-face, by phone, texting, or social media?  |     |    |
| Do you participate in a Wellness Program?  |     |    |
| Do you have anyone professional who inquiries about what you need to be successful?  |     |    |
| Do you have any family or friends who inquire about what you need to be successful? (i.e. support at home)   |     |    |
| Are there fellow principals that celebrate and motivate you?   |     |    |
| Does your district celebrate the work within your building?  |     |    |

| Healthy Habits   |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| Directions: As you self-reflect, use the first thought you have in response to each question to gain the best information to support planning for your wellness. | Yes | No |
| Do you get 7-9 hours of sleep each week night, including weekend?  |     |    |
| Do you have a bedtime routine? (bedtime, activity before bed)  |     |    |
| Do you expose yourself to screen-time (computer or phone) within 2 hours before you go to bed?   |     |    |
| Do you fall asleep in the living room or other location within your home?  |     |    |
| Do you complete work related tasks sitting in bed?   |     |    |
| Do you consume 8 glasses of water during the day?  |     |    |
| Do you consume the foods suggested on the Food Pyramid?  |     |    |
| Do you follow the portion sizes for the foods on the Food Pyramid?   |     |    |
| Do you have knowledge of how to determine portion size without measuring tools?  |     |    |
| Do you eat within 2 hours before you go to bed?  |     |    |
| Do you engage in physical activity for 150 minutes a week?   |     |    |

| Self-Care  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| Directions: As you self-reflect, use the first thought you have in response to each question to gain the best information to support planning for your wellness. | Yes | No |
| Do you have work hours that you adhere to on a consistent basis?   |     |    |
| Do you respond to, compose to send later, and/or send emails after work hours?   |     |    |
| Do you complete work outside of your working hours on a regular basis?   |     |    |
| Do you engage in family activities throughout the week after working hours on a regular basis?   |     |    |
| Are you able to complete home responsibilities in a timely manner (cooking, laundry, home projects, taking care of children, lawn work)                          |     |    |
| Do you have any hobbies you participate in on a regular basis?   |     |    |
| Do you relax with friends and family?  |     |    |
| Do you maintain a well-balanced diet?  |     |    |
| Do you take naps?  |     |    |
| Do you take regular breaks at work?  |     |    |
| Do you participate in mindfulness activities on a regular basis?   |     |    |



## Principal Wellness: Tips & Action Steps

| <u><b>Working in Isolation</b></u>  |  |
|---|--|
| Incorporate all staff, principals, and district administration when focusing on interactions.   |  |
|   | Action Steps & Date for Implementation:<br><br>(Who, When, What) |
| <b>Collegial Interaction-Collaboration</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with other principals on district initiatives that impact buildings</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify areas that need improvement or develop new initiatives. Collaborate with principals on a plan for proposal and/or implementation</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent collaborative sessions (scheduled weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.) with other principals for brainstorming building level areas of needed improvement</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate after a professional development with other principals on ideas for implementation</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with other principals about action steps for addressing areas of needed improvement (Academic Data, Discipline Data, Attendance Data, Professional Learning for Instructional Practice, Book Studies)</li> </ul> |  |
| <b>Collegial Relationships-Interpersonal Connects</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaming building activities with other principals scheduled regularly- Preset on calendars with plenty of notice</li> </ul>  |  |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check &amp; Connect Phone calls on a regular basis- preset on your calendar</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships, learn individual strengths, empower others through strength development with opportunities of building tasks (delegation opportunities)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule site visits and extend invitations of site visits<br/>-agenda and “agenda less” visits<br/>-agenda could include calibrating the use of a new teacher supervision system, brainstorming ideas centered around new learning for implementation, climate and culture assessment support</li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be strategic when sitting by colleagues at meetings- Sit by a variety of principals</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find ways to form bonds with others</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on learning about others’ personal lives</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember the “little things” (show real interest) about people- Random acts of Kindness</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find ways to celebrate with and for others</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultivate a positive outlook</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control your emotions</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge others’ expertise</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover one good trait in every colleague</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be an active listener</li> </ul>  |  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice empathy</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>Collegial Interaction- Mentor Experiences</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be confident in your ability and share</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule time to mentor or find a mentor</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network with organization members</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in professional development opportunities with others</li> </ul>                        |  |
| <b>Shared Leadership</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a team that has a shared direction and trusts one another-Team Building Activities</li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop committees that are diverse for opportunities for others to share their voice</li> </ul>    |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather and share individual's thoughts systematically</li> </ul>                                    |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be collaborative in developing plans</li> </ul>   |  |

| <b><u>Support Systems</u></b>  |   |
|--|---|
| Incorporate the use of district developed plans and those that you create.   |   |
|  | Action Steps & Date for Implementation: (Who, When, What) |
| <b>Mentorship/Coaching Support</b>   |   |
| • Mentor an aspiring leader within your building   |   |
| • Find mentor or leadership coaching program that focuses on leaderships skills as well as an emphasis on social and emotional |   |
| • Novice principals participate in some type of induction program  |   |
| • Inquire and learn how to delegate tasks  |   |
| <b>Wellness Program</b>  |   |
| • Participate in a Wellness Program  |   |
| • Identify and use as needed an Employee Access Center   |   |

| <b><u>Healthy Habits</u></b>  |   |
|---|---|
|   | Action Steps & Date for Implementation: (Who, When, What) |
| <b>Sleep Hygiene</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain 7-9 hours of sleep every night throughout the week</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set and use specific times for bedtime and wake up time</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take power naps (no longer than 30 minutes) twice a day if needed</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those with difficulty sleeping or irregular sleeping patterns, keep a Sleep Diary to identify habits and trends to develop a plan<br/> <a href="https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/SleepDiaryv6.pdf">https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/SleepDiaryv6.pdf</a> </li> </ul> |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep track of sleep debt, hours missed out of the 7-9, and work to compensate for the lost time by going to bed earlier, waking up later, or taking short naps (Sleep debt should be repaid slow and steady)</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid stimulants such as caffeine</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercise promotes quality sleep</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce fluid intake before bedtime</li> </ul>  |   |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict beverages that are carbonated drinks or alcohol right before bedtime</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrict foods that are fatty and fried, spicy, citrus fruits right before bedtime</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek exposure to natural light during the day</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine (shower/bath, reading a book, drawing)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish locations outside of the bedroom for work related tasks</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a pleasant sleeping environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Room is quiet, dark, relaxing, and comfortable temperature (health organizations recommend 60-67 degrees)</li> <li>-Remove electronic devices</li> <li>-Use a mattress and pillow as recommended</li> <li><a href="https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-pick-right-pillow-you">https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-pick-right-pillow-you</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Tips during menstruation, menopause, and pregnancy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bedtime routine begin a little earlier</li> <li>Take a warm bath or shower</li> <li>Avoid naps in the late afternoon</li> <li>Use mindfulness practices</li> <li>Use additional pillows (Try sleeping on your side with one pillow at your back, one between your legs, and one to rest your arms.)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit daily screen time, none 30 minutes before bedtime</li> </ul>   |  |

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| <b>Hydration</b>  |  |
| • Eat foods with water content throughout the day   |  |
| • Drink 8 glasses of water  |  |
| <b>Diet</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow guidelines of the food pyramid <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Foods or drinks high in fat, sugar, salt = not everyday</li> <li>-Fats, Spreads, Oils = In very small amounts</li> <li>-Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Beans, Nuts = 2 servings a day</li> <li>-Milk, Yogurt, Cheese = 3 servings a day</li> <li>-Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta, rice = 3-5 servings a day</li> <li>-Vegetables, Salads, Fruit = 5-7 servings a day</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use correct portion sizes for serving size<br/> <a href="https://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating/Food,-Diet-and-Health/Eating-In/Serving-sizes.aspx">https://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating/Food,-Diet-and-Health/Eating-In/Serving-sizes.aspx</a> </li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Exercise</b>   |  |
| • At least 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity (i.e. brisk walking)   |  |
| • At least 2 days a week of activities that strengthen muscles  |  |

| <u><b>Self-Care</b></u>   |   |
|---|---|
|   | Action Steps & Date for Implementation: (Who, When, What) |
| <b>Work-Life Balance</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain regular working hours (including tasks and communication) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-establish a plan and communicate with staff</li> <li>-find a hidden location within your building that only you and your administrative assistant knows about to give you a little time to complete tasks uninterrupted during working hours</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a morning and end of day routine</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule and adhere to break times</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialize with colleagues, family, and friends</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take sick days as needed</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be positive and do things that make you happy</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for professional learning opportunities</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take advantage of perks provided</li> </ul>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be self-compassionate</li> </ul>   |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in hobbies</li> </ul>   |   |



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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn to recognize and manage stress with Healthy Habits</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get recommended hours of sleep, maintain a healthy diet, maximize your support system</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set limits (make lists, learn to say no, reduce email access, leave work at work)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At home (unplug from technology, divide and conquer responsibilities, meal prep lunches for the week)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At work (set manageable goals each day, develop quarterly plans based on your School Improvement Plan to guide weekly agenda, ask for flexibility, communicate when there are stressors with your boss)</li> </ul> |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make time to practice your faith</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Mindfulness</b>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commit to a weekly routine for a mindfulness practice daily (Timeframe can be short or long depending on your needs. Research has found steady practice is beneficial.)</li> </ul>                                 |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow yourself to have daily mindful pauses throughout the day (Pause and feel your in breath and out-breath for 10-15 seconds)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support accountability of mindfulness practice</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice mindfulness</li> </ul>  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use mindfulness to become self-compassionate (Forgive yourself, repeatedly)</li> </ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use positive thinking to overcome the negative using character strengths</li> </ul>  |  |

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| <p>-See Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice<br/> <a href="https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298351645_Mindfulness-Based_Strengths_Practice_MBSP_for_Enhancing_Well-Being_Managing_Problems_and_Boosting_Positive_Relationships">https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298351645_Mindfulness-Based_Strengths_Practice_MBSP_for_Enhancing_Well-Being_Managing_Problems_and_Boosting_Positive_Relationships</a></p> |  |
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